

The Republican.

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TO MR. R. CARLILE, DORCHESTER GAOL.

MUCH VALUED SIR,

I HAVE perused and reperused with increased and most heart-felt admiration, that, as you justly term it, "beautiful Essay on Revolution," in your Republican of the 17th, and do cordially coincide with you in thinking it on the whole, "a specimen of perfect political philosophy;" and with sincere truth I can declare, that it is the very excess of this feeling which induces me, under a strong sense of deference to a mind so superiorly cast as that displayed by the writer, to direct his observation to what has struck me as a contradictory imperfection in an exquisite performance—a little spot in a glorious effulgence of light.

"If," says the Essay, "all men were equally powerful, or equally virtuous, there would be no such a thing as a Government; for there would be nothing on earth to be governed. We must never lose sight of that maxim laid down by Paine, that society is the consequence of our mutual wants, and Government of our vices." Again—"Let it not be lost sight of that Government itself is an evil; a necessary one it is true, but nevertheless an evil, and a great one; an error of magnitude, but the legitimate consequence of other errors to which society is a victim." And again—"it follows then, or ought to follow, that however remote the period may be, a period will arrive when mankind will be released from that enormous evil—Government."

Now, Sir, these are the propositions, which appear to me to involve a good deal of paradoxical inconsistency to the general tenour of this excellent dissertation:—a false premise can never lead to a just conclusion, but may, and no doubt often does, tend to the embarrassment of a very simple question; and the importance of the subject now before us, centres, I conceive, more in this view of it than in any "argument" which the writer seems to have anticipated some

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“captious slave might endeavour to draw from it in support of established oppression”—for the arguments of these slaves, thanks to the progress of such opinions as this able writer inculcates, have ceased to be listened to, except indeed by their immediately dependant fellow slaves.

The abstract and consequent inference to be drawn from all the above quotations, if I rightly understand their designed import, is, that every Government instituted for the management of the business of society, is a real and “enormous evil” at all times and in all cases, although admitted to be necessary, and that in proportion as mankind advance towards the point of human perfectibility, all Governments will become nugatory; and having reached that happy point, they will be altogether released from that “enormous evil”—“as there would be nothing on earth to be governed.” The question then, thus stated, naturally assumes two distinct features of consideration—a direct and cotemporary, and a prospective and very distant—one as relates to the immediate operations of society progressing towards perfect civilization, and the other as relates to society arrived at it. The maxim of Paine, that “society is the consequence of our mutual wants, and Government of our vices,” never appeared to my mind a satisfactory definition of a comprehensive truth; and much less does it thus detached from his own context—but the general conclusion I have drawn from it, as to the implied meaning of the latter assertion of this maxim, has been that it was intended to apply merely to that branch of civil government denominated criminal jurisprudence; for surely, as an abstract and immutable principle, Government is as necessary and dependent a consequence of human beings living in society, as “society is the consequence of our mutual wants,” even though vices, or penal statutes, did not exist;—the wants of society and the wants of individuals equally demand the auxiliary and conservative assistance of associated powers of intelligence and experience; if this be admitted as true, the assertion that every Government is an evil, becomes an overthrown fallacy—or an ill-explained supposition incautiously assumed. But let us pursue the subject in the order we have proposed, and endeavour to illustrate, by reference to actual present society, the important truth that social institutions founded on the principles of natural justice can never be an evil; it would indeed seem, that good Governments, thus constituted, because they so rarely exist, have been strangely confounded in one indiscriminating censure with the bad, which unfortunately at present al-

most every where embitter man's happiness and retard his progress.

Taking then, as we find them, society and the Governments whose ordinances sway its destinies, we cannot fail to be impressed with an immensity of evil every where pervading them—and a little reflection soon assures us that a very large proportion of the ills we remark are generated and fostered by the very regulations ostensibly professing to prevent them; that such a system, or Government, is an "enormous evil," all must fully agree; but as this state is, in a great measure, the result of individual man's nature and original ignorance, it may be considered the intermediate and almost unavoidable path for society to pass through in its march towards a pure and enlightened civilization; and the only wish and aim of the truly virtuous will be to substitute, by a revolution of the least possible tendency to injure, a change best suited to the overthrow of reigning abuses and misery, and to assist society in its advance. It would be difficult to conceive a more clear detail and development of the principles of such a revolution than is embodied in the Essay from which I quote; furnishing, I think, a direct affirmative commentary to the converse of the assertion I dispute.

It seems almost ridiculous to state in words, so self-evident a fact, as that a regulation, a law, or a system of laws, introduced to the removal of palpable evils, cannot be itself "an enormous evil;" even supposing it not entirely free from some imperfections, still it is a good system, as far as it goes, and being designed for good, it is the imperfection of the system, and not the existence of the system, or in other words, the Government itself, which may be termed an evil; this observation can necessarily only apply to popular governments; all others being founded on the oppression of the many to feed the indolence and rapacity of the few.

But while we readily grant that vices, crimes, and misery, to a vast extent, are the sure progeny of bad governments, we must acknowledge many vices and crimes, or to write more philosophically, many moral errors, to be the immediate effects of man's natural ignorance, the unchecked operation of which would disturb the good order of society, and which the self-preservation of that society is directly interested in suppressing, therefore a legislative enactment established, by any society, on the pure principles of natural justice, to restrain or punish any of its transgressing members,

must be considered a salutary and good law, and not an "evil," or an unnecessary restriction of personal liberty: and even should the law be somewhat imperfect in principle, and occasion, in its administration, some injustice, it would be the error in the law, and not its existence as a law, that would constitute the evil. Enough I conceive has now been stated to shew that while bad Governments and unjust laws are the greatest of all "enormous evils," good ones, even in a very imperfect state of society, are every thing but an evil, and act as indispensable securities for its preservation, and only sure guidance on to that state of happy perfection, when all laws and governments, it has been imagined, will be no longer necessary. This at once brings us to the second division of our subject.

That the supposed possibility of the mind and character of man being capacitated ever to arrive at a perfection of all their intellectual and moral attributes, has at all times been scouted or laughed at as visionary, by the selfish, the narrow-minded, the religious, and the corrupt, is but too notorious; but that a capability exists in the primitive organism of human intelligence to be perfected; in all its physical and moral functions, to the utmost extent of all the powers of that organism, one would imagine to be a truth that no one, the least removed from the grossest ignorance, would be disposed to dispute: the extent of this capability, and of these powers, it would be presumptuous, even in the present age of comparative light, to attempt to define, that it expands in proportion to the influence of every new acquisition, the experience of our own individual natures, and our observations on the progress of society will sufficiently testify; but notwithstanding the period may be very far distant, when the accumulated knowledge of civilized ages shall enable man to say "these are the boundaries of the human mind, it can go no farther;" yet it is not difficult to suppose that such limitations are unalterably stamped in the eternal laws of Nature: perhaps it is in the immutable necessity of these limitations in the operation of the moral functions of the human machine, that the very essence of their perfectibility exists; and as a general truth, it cannot be too much borne in mind, that every perfection of which our nature is susceptible must be in accordance with the peculiar and known laws of that nature, and never in opposition to them; this is more immediately striking in the moral and practical character of man, than in that of his mental capabilities; thus, in order to render a man virtuous,

it is not indispensable that he should be first made miserable; in short that Nature never demands a sacrifice to be made in the cause of virtue, greater than the good achieved by the performance of the virtuous action, and whenever virtue has been outraged by the contrary of this, it has been in direct opposition and not in agreement with the laws of nature, too many instances of which, unfortunately, are at present to be found; and, Sir, none more flagrantly outrageous, than the legalized oppressions inflicted on yourself, and the courageous self-devotion with which you continue to submit to them.

I insist the more strongly on the foregoing premise, as there are certain minds it would seem, who appear to think mankind susceptible of a perfectibility superior to or in opposition to Nature, or above the wants, the inclinations, and the passions natural to and growing out of the peculiar organization of the human animal; and to this class of thinking, I suspect, belongs, although perhaps not intended so to apply by the writer, my first quotation.

Government, as I have before said, is a necessary consequence of beings, constituted like man, being together in numbers; and as we have no knowledge, either from experience or from history, of mankind herding together in even the most savage tribes, beyond a few families, without some rules, by which the affairs common to the whole were directed; it is difficult to conceive how a society could preserve its existence without some such rules of general discipline, so highly civilized, as that would be where all were as virtuous, enlightened, and powerful as ever the best characters among ourselves, where the wants would be so multiplied, and the interests and relative situations of men, would become the more complicate in a ratio proportionate to these wants; and where both must ever be the immediate result of every new and public improvement. It is true, that in a society like the one we are now contemplating, criminal jurisprudence would scarcely exist, or would be rarely resorted to, as there would be nothing to restrain or punish, although I think there would be very much "to be governed;" for the business of enacting penal laws and carrying them into execution, constitutes but a very minor proportion of the general affairs of any Government; and still less would that proportion be in a truly civilized one. Let us then suppose we had arrived at the highest possible degree of perfection, either as individuals, or as congregated in society, it will be evident, that in this state, as in the present, our mutual wants

would necessitate us to mutual intercourse; and while the intrinsic principles of man's nature remains the same, he must ever judge and decide upon the merits of every transaction by the evidences alone presented to his own mind, and as these may be sometimes seen through a false medium, or be too partially examined, an erroneous conclusion would be formed—and it being not possible for a mind, however perfect, to resign an opinion it believes to be true and just, a difference between the negotiating parties would possibly ensue, and beget a necessity for the intervention of a disinterested and impartial umpire: in cases of little consequence neighbours and friends would be able to arrange every thing satisfactorily; but, it is not difficult to anticipate the existence of an affair possessing so many features, and shades of consideration, as to demand the decision of a still more disinterested and weighty arbitrator, which could only be found in a public functionary established by law, and which, when established, would constitute a Court of Equity, or general appeal, and would be a most essential conservative to public justice and social tranquillity: all this too might take place in a society as perfect as can be imagined, without impugning the character of its perfection, or attaching crime or evil intention to individuals. But other more important avocations would be found, even in the purest state of mankind, to necessitate the existence of a Government, besides the comparatively trifling duties of providing against individual errors and adjusting individual disputes. Any regulation which it might be deemed requisite to make for general benefit, by a number of individuals herding together in that state we call society, would doubtless constitute an elementary principle of what I comprehend by the term Government; that the Government, or the regulations which would guide the affairs of men in a truly pure and rational civilization, would be as dissimilar to existing systems as are to each other, truth and error—virtue and crime—or as abject slavery and the most unbounded freedom, must be readily admitted; but however few in number, or simple in constitution; however seldom resorted to, or however justly and beneficially these regulations might be administered, still their very existence would embrace a scheme of social compact, and that scheme would comprehend all that we designate by the name of civil Government.

This abstract definition of a simple proposition seems called for by the assertion, that, if all men were really virtuous, "there would be nothing on earth to be governed;" an as-

sertion, I repeat, which presupposes a chimerical species of existence and perfectness, altogether incompatible with, and foreign to, the nature of man: something of a kindred with the mystical day-dreams of religious enthusiasts, which, evers though possible to be realized, would be either an insipid or mischievous acquisition, a boon the good would want interest to seek, and the great would refuse to accept.

Let us again recur to the contemplation of a society of perfect human beings, beings as perfect as their physical and intellectual natures can be rationally supposed capable of becoming; and amidst the multiform and ever varying relations of such beings in the active operations of their social interchange, let us imagine the possibility of dispensing with all legislative rules which relate to individual localities and interests, and how forcibly shall we be struck with the vastness of the necessity: for numbers of other important establishments on which the well-being, nay the very existence of such a society would depend, for it must not be forgotten that man, in his social as in his individual capacity, acquires in the march of improvement, new wants to be satisfied, and new capacities for enjoyment, to the multiplying his dependencies on aids independent of his own intrinsic capabilities. How many great works of general good present themselves to the mind, which could alone be perfected under the sanction of a legislative assembly, composed as would assuredly be the case in the community before us, of the real delegates of all its members, and which works could be made available, as would be designed, to the service of the whole, only by the powers entrusted to such a body, and the laws it enact. Your elegant essayist has himself enumerated several of the public works, demanding the authoritative interference of the public will, through its official organ, an appointed Government, such as, "bridges, canals, roads, harbours, &c." and how many more there would be, both in relation to the interests of a particular nation, and that nation's connections with foreign countries, of equal magnitude and importance, it is not now I hope necessary to our present purpose to state.

In what I have here written, I trust it will not be considered that I have been actuated by a carping wish to single out a simple blemish, disparage the worth of an instructive, eloquent, and truly valuable piece of writing, and for the great pleasure I have derived from its reading, I take this opportunity to return the author my most grateful acknowledgements.

In a book so widely disseminated as "The Republican"

and one of whose principal objects is to introduce into existence correct first principles, it struck me that what appeared an erroneous opinion on this ground should not pass unexamined : and at once formed the motive of this address, and is my best apology for its length.

Repeating the wish of all your friends for your success and happiness, I am your sincere admirer,

HARMODIUS.

A DISCOURSE, DELIVERED BEFORE THE EDINBURGH ZETETIC SOCIETY, ON THE ABSURDITY OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

For the better understanding of the subject of this discourse, I have divided it into two parts; the first treats of the inconsistency of various kinds of creeds and public worships, and the second on the incomprehensibility of the object of worship.

First then, all kinds of prayers, worships, or supplications, are indicative that the being to whom they are addressed is either ignorant of, or careless about, the wants of the addressors, and one would be led to believe, from a view of the many different ways of public worship, that every sect had a different object of adoration. I need not take notice of the forms practised by the various nations of the Pagan world, but I may take a slight glance at two or three systems that have made a great figure in theological history; and I beg you to keep in mind that every different system is considered by its votaries to be the only true one.

The first system to which I shall call your attention is, that which is practised by the chosen and peculiar people of Jehovah commonly denominated Jews. They believe, that the only worship pleasing to their Deity consists in the sacrificing of animals, and boiling or roasting their flesh to gratify his olfactory nerves with a delicious smell! The priests, at the same time, take care to retain for their gratification the substance from which the smell proceeds. It is also an indispensable rule with them, to abstain from eating the flesh of swine, hares, &c.; whilst they have no scruples whatever at devouring innocent sheep and lambs. The peculiarity of the dress of their priests, and several of their ceremonies are absolutely ridiculous, and their book of pretended revelations is nothing but historical tradition, mixed up with the mythology of the Pagans; to whom indeed all the modern systems are indebted for their foundations.

The Jews, in addition to all their other customs, meet regularly on the seventh day to worship their God, who, they say, spent an eternity, as to the past, without motion; and after he had conceived the plan of the solar system, though infinitely powerful, took six days to execute it; some Jewish writers are of opinion that it was six ages, this kind of reasoning is calculated to make us conclude that the Deity is not capable of doing all things at once, but, like a mechanic,

must do a piece of work in a given time; therefore we may reasonably believe that he is still making worlds and suns, and systems to fill up the immensity of space, and will continue to do so through all the ages of eternity. They likewise inform us that he made the first human being like himself, both male and female, that he afterwards saw that plan would not do, separated them into two distinct beings, put them into a beautiful garden, which he himself had planted for the purpose, and gave them the free use of every thing in it except one tree, the fruit of which was calculated to make them to know good from evil. It would appear that their God, at that time, intended them to remain for ever in ignorance; but, behold the plan was again altered, and he allowed a subtle, cunning, speaking serpent to come into the garden to betray the poor innocent and harmless pair, and for their simplicity; (although he had made them so simple) he was so terribly enraged that he immediately laid a curse upon them and their posterity, and turned them out of his fine garden. After permitting the race to work iniquity in his sight, for about two thousand years, he at length determined on the shocking, the cruel, the horrible plan of drowning all except one family, though he must certainly have known that the progeny of that blessed family, would be as bad as those he had so inhumanly consigned to a watery grave.

At another grand epoch of their history, they inform us that God saw that it was necessary to let his will be known, to have it obeyed, he therefore delivered to Moses, for the instruction of this barbarous tribe, a code of rules, which to say no worse of it, has no kin to morality. All the successors of this cruelly inspired man, Moses, have kept up his system, except the Christians.

The Christians have taken up the story where the Jews left off, and they have spun, with the assistance of a more recent publication of equally divine origin, a ponderous fabric of worship, but diametrically opposite to that of the Jews. They have made the indivisible God of this chosen people to divide himself into three parts, and they believe that one of those parts went into the womb of a woman, lay there for the period of nine months, to be born in the common way, to drag out a mean and obscure existence, and at last, to be put to the ignominious death of a malefactor! and all to satisfy his own implacable revenge against poor silly mortals who acted according to the organizations that he had given them; and who, according to their own belief, must go wrong the moment they are left without his immediate superintendence. The Christians are anxious to persuade us also, that, in despite of the death of this son, who, by the by, is as old as his father, and who died solely for the purpose of saving mankind from the unforgiving vengeance of this said merciful father: a very few of the human race in every generation are brought to salvation, and those happy few are only such as have been elected by the father from all eternity; so that the death of this son, this only son, has been of no avail, because the elected number must be saved, and all the rest of mankind were condemned to eternal misery

long before they were called into existence. The death of this god was therefore no benefit to them, nor would it be of any service to them, if all the three gods one after another were to be sacrificed to the caprice of each other, and to come to life again, so long as their unhappy fiat is irrevocably fixed. On the other hand, the elect are conducted to a place called heaven, but not for their good works, nor as a reward for moral rectitude; but because they were made expressly for that happy, but undescribed, situation; where or how situated no person can find out; as it only exists in the disturbed brain of enthusiasts and fanatics.

The Christians also, like the Jews, have public worship every seventh day. The plan doubtless is taken from the Jewish Scripture; but the day is altered from the *divine* institution, without any order or injunctions whatever; as well may they meet on any other day, or at any other stated time, or not at all; but certainly, if the God of nature intended one day to be kept apart, in preference to another, he would have marked that day in a particular manner; do the winds, or tides, or any of the elements of nature pay any respect to it? If the ocean were to become agitated upon Sunday, and to threaten with destruction the lives and properties of our fellow men; we certainly would step forward to their assistance, and would not such an agitation of the elements, according to this system of sabbath-keeping, be like a trap laid to ensnare men, to work that day; although the Deity had expressly forbidden it, and could he not have kept the winds and waters still, that his commandment might have been obeyed, and his worship performed?

The Christian system is so diametrically opposite to the Jewish, that no candid and impartial inquirer can for a moment see the least analogy, nor would any person ever suppose that the former was built upon the ruins of the latter; it is therefore obvious, that if the Jewish system be of divine origin, the Christians are far in the wrong, and if the former is false, then the latter is nothing but a castle in the air, which will fly from enquiry like a cloud before the wind.

Let us now take a view of a still more modern system of revelation, that is believed by far the greater proportion of what are called civilized human beings, I mean the system of worship practised by the followers of Mahomet; the best and only true prophet! it is a tissue of absurdities founded upon the ancient fables of the Pagans, Jews, and Christians. The Mahometans believe that their Koran is an eternal book, that it was written by the fingers of God and handed down from heaven to Mahomet leaf by leaf. Their religion consists of various tenets, namely the unity of God; the divine mission and authority of Mahomet; the necessity of praying five times in a day, of fasting from the rising to the setting of the sun for one month in the year; of going to Mecca once, at least, of paying the tenth of all they possess to support their system of Religion, of drinking no wine, of eating no pork, and lastly, I may mention, though not of the least insignificant, of making war upon all unbelievers. They consider that, by observing these rules of faith and practice, and attending

public worship, which consists of prayers, ablutions, thanksgivings, and flattery, once in the week, they will be conducted over the infernal gulph, by a bridge as narrow as a hair and as sharp as a razor, to the mansions of eternal bliss and felicity; where there will be rivers of milk and honey, groves and gardens of the finest fruit trees and aromatic spices, the taste and perfumes of which, will be infinitely delightful; and where they will live in uninterrupted intercourse with the most beautiful females, whose virginity will be perpetually renewed, and where the vigour of men will be renovated at their pleasure.

After thus taking a slight view of the three distinguished systems, all pretended to have the only true revelation; each of which is believed from the effects of education, and not from choice; and the children of any one of the systems, if early turned over and initiated into another, would doubtless strenuously maintain that the belief and worship of the one from which they had passed was grossly false: I proceed to take a general view of worship. The plans of public worship practised by each sect, each are different from the other and equally absurd; we may therefore conclude that such heterogeneous forms and ceremonies, are of no avail to themselves, nor can they afford any pleasure to the great God of nature who certainly is exalted far above flattery and adulation. Before men adopt any mode of public worship it is reasonable to suppose that they should know something about the nature of the object of their worship; but do we find in any of their books of pretended revelation, any thing like a consistent description of the Deity? Wherever an attempt has been made to describe him, has he not always been represented as a changeable, capricious, and revengeful being? In their public prayers and supplications, each party impress him to direct and protect them, as being his own peculiar people, they flatter him with the most fulsome adulation; in short, they speak to him, and of him, just as a being of their own species; they call him, infinitely powerful, infinitely wise, infinitely just, infinitely merciful, infinitely good, though, at the same time, they are sensible of innumerable evils, both in the physical and moral world, which a being endowed with these infinitely excellent qualities, would have prevented, or he would not have called such things into existence at all. The effects of volcanoes, earthquakes, tornadoes, lightnings, hurricanes, and inundations of rivers and oceans, may be counted physical evils; but far greater evils arise from the physical construction of animals, they are so formed that they take pleasure in tormenting, and live by destroying one another; so unhappily are they situated that they have no alternative but to destroy and be destroyed: I may also mention, the evil propensities implanted in the human breast, which are the result of its composition and organization, and are therefore entwined with very existence, and nursed and matured with the life of the bodies. It is to these physical evils, that all the moral evil in the world is to be ascribed, because moral, is only the effect of physical, and both the good which we enjoy, and the evil which we endure, may be traced back to the great original cause of all.

Is it consistent with reason to admit of only one great and universal cause of all things, and at the same time deprive that cause of one half of the effect? Such half reasoning is only to be expected, where interest and enthusiasm have warped the senses: now, if the great principal of universal nature, by the operation of its immutable laws, produces both good and evil, how can men offer up prayers, give flattery, and adulation, at public worship, for the good they enjoy, without complaining of the evils they are forced to endure? And, for aught we know, the Deity would be as well pleased with being censured for the evil in the world, as he is with the fulsome flattery he receives for the good. In consideration of the above observations, I believe it to be nothing less than an insult to the Deity, to offer him public prayers and supplications, as they are always in the strain of dictation, and endeavouring to persuade him to alter the irrevocable laws, by which the whole of the universe is governed: besides, we do not know, according to the nature of things, but the very favour which we are most anxious to obtain, if ever granted by our request, would be injurious either to ourselves or some other being in the world. Certainly the all-wise and powerful being, knows best how to regulate the affairs of the universe; and if he is so infinitely good as theologians represent him, he will undoubtedly do every thing in the best possible manner; these mystical divines wish us to believe that the prayers and entreaties of poor mortal man, the being of a day, will make the Deity alter his eternal plan: Or must we suppose that he made the human race, on purpose to flatter him, that he might act according to their directions and requests?

Let me now observe, what a heterogeneous mass the public worships and prayers of every different sect will make in the aggregate, as it is well known they are all diametrically opposite to one another; it is nothing less than impossible that the Deity can answer the prayers of all the different parties, in the manner that they desire: the Jews pray for the period of the coming of their temporal Messiah, and the gathering together of their people under that Messiah, when they are to live happy in their native land, and have the pleasure of meeting yearly at Jerusalem in a body for public worship.

The Christians on the other hand, are fervently interceding with the divine being, to convert all the nations of the earth to their way of worship, and their enthusiasm and vanity is such, that they actually believe that no other worship is acceptable to the Deity but their own: we likewise find the Mahometans when engaged in their public worship and supplications, praying fervently for the conversion, or destruction of all infidels: amongst whom they include Jews and Christians of every denomination, as well as harmless polytheists, and pagans of every description; and as their prayers and supplications have not the desired effect, they are not backward in brandishing the sword and attacking in the most furious manner, the opposers of their holy and incontrovertible doctrine.

Now, when we see that each of these doctrines, and of course their public worship and prayers are diametrically opposite to each other,

how it is possible for a man of common sense to suppose, that they are consistent with reason. Every kind of public worship must therefore be perfectly insignificant in the eye of the unchangeable being; whose plans are immutable. Though all the various sects on the face of the earth, would pray till the air should ring, it would not make the Deity alter one degree from the plan of nature already established: therefore worship, adulation, flattery, and prayers will never have any effect, though expressed in the most serious and fervent manner. The sound will vibrate and be lost in the endless regions of space, and, in fact, never be heard a gun-shot distance from the hole whence it proceeds.

I now come to the second part of my discourse, namely, the incomprehensibility of the object of worship. To be able to understand what kind of worship is pleasing, or whether any kind at all is acceptable to the Deity; it is necessary first, to understand the nature of that being: now, as there is no person qualified to describe the nature of God; and indeed none except raving fanatics have ever attempted it, and those who have been foolish enough to engage in the unaccomplishable task, have only betrayed their own ignorance; how ridiculous are their descriptions! how widely do they differ from one another! how incompatible are the attributes they ascribe to him! and after all their laborious descriptions, they have only decked him out with their own capricious qualities, because, in fact, they had no idea of any better. Behold then the character of the Jewish God as delineated in their revealed book! a cruel, vindictive, revengeful, imbecile, changeable, and malicious tyrant; and to our utter astonishment, the polished, the scientific Christians, have adopted him in all the grossness of his Jewish attributes; and have made him still more ridiculous, because they have divided him into three distinct substances or beings, in short, like a Pagan Tripod, or a three-legged stool; they have made the Deity nothing less than a hydra-headed, triple-bodied monster! the God of the Mahometans is depicted as a being something similar to the God of the Jews; cruel, inconsistent, and more inclined to exterminate, than to instruct the ignorant race of men. But should not the rational and thinking part of mankind, hold in utter contempt, all such horrid descriptions of the Deity?

Young as is our institution, as an enquiring body, I hope that we are inclined to take a more philosophical view of this subject: let us shake from our minds the prejudices of our early education; let us wipe from our eyes the mist of superstition, and investigate the wonderful phenomena of nature with an anxious desire to arrive at the truth: let our investigations be conducted as though we had never heard a foolish assertion made on the subject. When we contemplate the world and the wonderful existences that inhabit it; when we survey the solar system, and revolve in our minds the admirable order and harmony of its motions; when we launch forth our enquiries into the immensity of space, and as it were travel from system to system, and from planet to planet, and contemplate that boundless ocean, which is doubtless studded at proper distances from each other

with innumerable planets and systems, all revolving with unerring regularity, and in all probability animated with an endless variety of beings. When thinking man contemplates all these things; he must be convinced of the existence of a great principle that maintains the order and harmony by which the whole of the wonderful and stupendous fabric of the universe exists; but at the same time, no reasoning man should personify that great principle, nor attribute to it the capricious qualities natural to man, such as anger, hatred, revenge, envy, and a desire of flattery: these qualities are only natural to beings who have equals, or superiors to compete with; but that cannot be the case with the great principle of universal nature, which can have no equal, and therefore no rival, nor can it be affected by the actions of any kind of inferior beings. Whether this great principle be abstracted from nature, or generally diffused over every part of the universe, or as it were mixed up with every particle of matter, or whether it be matter itself, we are at present equally ignorant of its qualities, and it becomes our duty to make no assertions nor be dogmatical on the subject; whether this great principle be more analagous to the animated part of the universe, than it is to the vegetable or mineral parts, we know not; but certain we are, that in all cases there is an analogy betwixt cause and effect, and if this principle is the original cause of every thing that exists, then there must be some analogy or relation between it and the grossest parts of nature, as well as the finest. It certainly betrays a great want of philosophy in man, to suppose that the Deity is exactly like himself, and has no resemblance whatever to the other beings and things in nature; while at the same time he maintains that the whole of nature, good and bad, coarse and fine, is produced by this one cause.

Nothing we are capable of conceiving approaches the nature of the Deity, we can form no idea either of his form, essence, or existence, and if we suppose him to be a being abstracted from nature, then are we as ignorant of his place of abode. There are secrets which will for ever be hid from the scrutiny of man; but we may easily perceive, by observing the operations of nature, that it is that great principle, from which all things take the spring of their existence: it is the source of motion, of life and death. The whole universe is regulated by it, and the production or destruction of worlds or animals, are equally indifferent to its happiness. From our experience of nature, we know that every thing is conducted by regular laws, nothing is changed or altered without a natural cause, and means are always adopted to ends. Beings of every kind are produced by causes exterior to themselves, are conducted to their final dissolution and perhaps changed into other substances; for what is at this moment part of the mineral kingdom may be passed into the vegetable, and by the continual operations of nature, may be changed not only into flesh, blood, and bones, but also into the rational mind. The common law of nature is production and destruction, and every being in nature is unavoidably subjected to this common

law. We see from the foregoing observations, the incomprehensibility of the Deity; consequently we may judge it folly to join in any kind of public worship to a being that is so undefinable, and indeed, it is impossible to define any object, or being, that is not perceptible to our senses.

Let us then, as rational men, enquire into the tangible subjects of nature; let us study science, and instruct one another in useful knowledge; we may with advantage dive into the secrets of nature, provided that we do not become dogmatical, or, by our study of the sublime, fall into the ridiculous. Let us in all our enquiries, guard ourselves against superstition; let us beware of flattering or dictating to a cause, of which we are almost entirely ignorant, but which we know acts by fixed principles that cannot be altered by our intercession. Implore not a cause, which, by the discord of elements, and the eternal production and destruction of forms carries on a perpetual warfare in nature which produces much individual misery, but keeps up the regularity and stability of the great whole; except not that the plan of nature or the essence and properties of beings will be changed for your momentary advantage. If the world was in a conflagration, the most pitiful cries and entreaties of the priests, ay, and the whole human race, men, women, and children, would not prevent them from being destroyed. Above all things, let us avoid that fanaticism, of ascribing to the Deity qualities which exist only in our own nature, or of trembling before a being of which we are ignorant; but whom man has clothed with the capricious nature of himself.

I have observed, in a former part of my discourse that God has been depicted by ignorant fanatics in the most hideous and demoniacal form; and tyrants have laid hold of that picture as a model for themselves, because tyrants in all ages have fattened on the credulity and superstition of the ignorant and unthinking multitude.

Let us in our enquiries, always take the experience of analysis for our guide, because the moment that we leave that unerring conductor, we are in danger of being carried away by the whirlwind of fancy; where reason, the noblest faculty, might lose her seat; and then be tossed like a ship without a rudder, in the tempestuous ocean of our passions.

We should also beware of indolence, as it inclines us to follow other men's opinions without troubling ourselves with investigations. It makes us avoid bodily action, and mental reflection, both of which, are essentially necessary for our health and improvement. Our effects, though commendable, will in a great measure be vain in searching into the hidden mysteries of nature. The world which we inhabit is almost unintelligible to us; matter of which every thing is composed, is entirely beyond our comprehension: How then can any person have the presumption to describe the great and unknown cause, the vivifying principle in nature? What reason have we, while unacquainted with all the secondary causes in nature, to pretend to expound the first? As well might a child, unacquainted with the

alphabet, attempt to decipher the hieroglyphics of the ancients. The world, as far as we can observe, is a perpetual scene of transmigration. As soon as any being is disorganised, the particles of which it was composed immediately assume another appearance, and pass away into other substances; and thus nature is in perpetual youth. But the great unknown principle is for ever the same; the unchangeable cause of all action, of all intelligence, of all pleasure, of all pain, of all good, and of all evil, any attempt to describe it, is nothing less than absolute absurdity, and since we cannot obtain any just idea of the Deity, let us not join with those enthusiastic fanatics, who make God like themselves; and then commence a system of flattery to please him. Let us boldly throw off a credulous respect for ancient errors, and think and act for ourselves; and not sit down contented with believing the popular opinions, which hold the Deity forth with such horrible and contradictory qualities. Let us despise such superstitious absurdities, and assemble ourselves together as rational men, for mutual instruction.

I hail with pleasure, the plans and principles of this young society; it appears to me like the rising sun verging above the horizon, dispelling the misty clouds of darkness and superstition that have so long enveloped the world. I hope there is nothing extravagant in anticipating this society as the cradle of men, who at no very distant day will assist in renovating insulted and degraded mankind. Allow me to exhort all of you to be anxious in promoting its interest and prosperity; and let every member, if possible, come forward with his discourse however lame it may appear to be; as we intend to proceed by calm enquiry to search after truth; and should wish to be informed, where and how we may be mistaken in our opinions, have our errors, if any, pointed out by each other, or any one, and from this mode of proceeding we may expect the most happy results.

J. A.

MR. JOSEPH RHODES, GILTSPUR STREET COMPTER.

Manchester, January 13, 1823, of the
immortal Son of God that died.

FRIEND AND FELLOW CITIZEN,

A FEW Republicans of Manchester, request your acceptance of the enclosed one pound, as a tribute of esteem to the man who volunteered from amongst them, to assist the much-injured Carlile; whom, the joint oppressors of the community united all their strength in order to subdue, because he had sufficient honesty to proclaim against the systems that have been so inimical to the welfare of the industrious citizen, and issued to the public such works as would teach them the means to secure permanent happiness, by the establishment of a real representative system of government, where every individual shall

have a voice in forming those laws to which he is expected to conform.

The tyrant and the hypocrite combined their forces, and marched against the Temple of Reason, hoping to destroy it without opposition; but yourself and others stepped forward to the combat, and have shown them that the Temple of Reason, Truth, and Justice, has its votaries, and such as are willing to sacrifice their own interests for the good of the whole; for the benefit, if not of the present, of succeeding generations.

Pray, my friend, by what reasoning can the priesthood, or the supporters of the state, (for I will not allow that the king has any choice in this matter, any more than in many other acts that are committed in his name) convince themselves that they have the power to chain the mind of man to any standard of belief they may please to dictate: to compel a nation to perform exteriorly such ceremonies as a very great majority must inwardly detest? Man is a creature of circumstances; his conduct is influenced, and his opinions are fixed, by the peculiar circumstances under which he is educated. Whatever principles he has imbibed in his youth, he retains with pertinacity, until he is shown, by arguments unanswerable, that they are erroneous. It is in vain to imprison a man for want of "faith." Instead of changing his opinions it must tend to strengthen them; and to convince the sufferer, that his opponents, although consisting of thousands of men who are enormously paid for propagating the "true Gospel," are unable to convince even an humble individual of its infallibility, unless indeed, it be by the secular power, (and that I think they will hardly do) which is exercised in defiance of all moral law. While they preach up the divine origin of their system of religion, and pretend that it can flourish without the support of any human being, they stamp themselves liars by lending their assistance to dungeoning an individual because he cannot believe their absurd dogmas. The torch of reason that has destroyed so many fabrics of superstition, must ultimately destroy the destructive influence of one class of society over another, and deprive every tyrant of the power to imprison unjustly his fellow creature.

That you may live to witness the base designs of our enemies rebound upon themselves; and to see every man, or woman, who is suffering for matters of opinion, obtain the reward each so justly deserves, is the ardent wish of the subscribers, and of none more than your well-wisher

W. CAMPION.

P. S. The leg of mutton that was sent to you in Christmas week, was a present from your old friend James Thompson.

	s.	d.		s.	d.
John Gratrix.	2	6	Robert Smith.	1	0
William Campion.	1	0	Samual Booth.	0	6
James Wheeler.	1	0	Robert Hurst.	0	6
Elijah Dixon.	0	6	Mary Walker, for "Tipp".	0	6

No. 5. Vol. VII.

	s.	d.		s.	d.
Jane Owen.	0	3	John Faulks.	0	6
William Thompson.	0	3	J. P.	0	3
M. Tapham.	0	6	M. Mitchel.	0	6
An Old Friend.	0	6	Elijah Ridings.	1	0
William Waddington.	0	6	Joseph Hargate.	1	0
Thomas Cooke.	0	6	J. G.	0	6
Joseph Tilford.	0	6	J. F. H.	1	0
J. H.	0	2	A. Nyne.	0	3
George Longbottom.	0	6	T. H.	0	6
S. R. P.	0	6	Wm. Hume	0	3
J.	0	2	Franklin's Ephemeron.	0	4
D. G. H. D.	1	0	John Turne, Materialist.	0	6
J. F.	0	3	Charles Naseby.	0	6
			Charles Ridings.	0	6

TO MR. CAMPION, MANCHESTER.

Giltspur Street Compter, January 17, 1823.

FRIEND AND FELLOW CITIZEN,

YOU, and my other friends in Manchester, will accept my thanks for the sum of One Pound; but, I assure you, I needed not this mark of esteem to convince me that I am not forgotten by my Republican friends, although the vindictive Judge, who doomed me to two years imprisonment for the publication of a pamphlet, the TRUTH of the principles of which not even my persecutors disputed, expressed his conviction that long before the expiration of my imprisonment they would forsake me!—that I should linger in my dungeon unnoticed, unthought of!

It is beyond the power of any set of men to chain the mind of an enlightened man, therefore they would keep him ignorant. But persecution defeats its own object: the attempts to crush one single individual who was struggling to ameliorate the condition of his fellow men, have made Deists of hundreds, who, a few years ago, scarcely knew the meaning of the word. Men must naturally conclude, that if religion be of God, it needs not the laws of man to uphold it; for that which has truth for its basis will stand the firmer for being investigated. It would be well for those who stickle so much for the existence of an Almighty God, to mind their own business and leave the Almighty Gentleman to take care of himself and his own concerns.

My Manchester friends know well that I never desired or sought for more than my rights; the right of being repre-

sented in Parliament, and the right to publish my opinions without being dungeoned for it, and though my body is bound I am still able and willing to lend a hand towards obtaining them.

Yours, sincerely,

JOSEPH RHODES.

Joseph Rhodes acknowledges the receipt of One Shilling from Jonathan Jackson of Oldham.

CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE LIFE OF ST. PAUL.

(Continued from page 117.)

CHAP. IV.

Life of St. Paul, according to the Acts of the Apostles.

I HAVE thus far shewn that nothing was more destitute of proof than the authenticity of the books which contain the life and writings of St. Paul. I have shewn that the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of St. Paul, were rejected by some Christian sects which subsisted from the earliest times of the church. It must have been seen that the opinion of the authenticity of these books was founded solely on traditions, to which it is very difficult to give credit, considering the characters of those by whom these traditions have been transmitted. It is however upon such suspicious guarantees, that the authority of these works has been pretended to be established; it will then be necessary to admit them at once and without examination, or else recur to reason in order to examine for ourselves, what we ought to think concerning them.

To form our ideas of St. Paul, let us then consult only these works, however suspected their origin may appear to us, which contain the detail of his life; there are no others to which we can have recourse.

The author of the Acts of the Apostles, whoever he be, relates the miraculous conversion of Saul, afterwards called

Paul, in the ninth chapter. We find him already named in the two preceding chapters, first as approving of the death of St. Stephen, the first martyr for the Christian religion, and next as persecuting and desolating the church. Not contented with tormenting the Christians of Jerusalem, he furnished himself with letters from the High Priest which authorised him to seize those whom he might find at Damascus; but, while on the road a miracle caused him to change all his projects; he is suddenly surrounded by a divine light without seeing any one, he hears the voice of Jesus of Nazareth, who demands of him the motives of his persecutions. Saul trembling enquired what conduct he ought to pursue. Jesus tells him, that at Damascus he would be informed of his intentions. Our persecutor on this occasion is struck blind, but his heart is converted, and sight is miraculously restored to him by a Christian of Damascus named Ananias, who had been, by a particular revelation informed of his hostile designs against the church, and of the great designs of God, who, of this persecutor, would form a vessel of election, that is to say, the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Soon after this conversion and cure, Saul is baptized and commences preaching Christ in the synagogues, confounding the Jews to such a degree that they came to the resolution to take away his life. But the new missionary deceived their vigilance by saving himself during the night by means of a basket, in which he was lowered, and made his escape from Damascus. He returned to Jerusalem where the disciples of Jesus were thrown into consternation at his appearance; but Barnabas presented him to the Apostles, informed them of his conversion, and enrolled him to their college. In consequence he preached the Gospel; this conduct soon raised troubles and persecutions against him on the part of the Jews, who again formed the design of putting him to death. But he found means of escaping from their fury by the assistance of some disciples who conducted him to Cesarea, whence they afterward sent him to Tarsus. Barnabas came and joined Saul in the latter city, whence he led him to Antioch. Here Saul and Barnabas remained during a year, they there made a great number of converts; it was there that the proselytes first took the name of Christians. To warm the zeal of the new converts, they sent for prophets from Jerusalem, one of these named Agabus predicted a great famine, which determined the disciples of Antioch to distribute alms to their brethren of Judea; Saul and Barna-

bas were the bearers of these marks of generosity, and the Apostles, whom the first faithful made the depositaries of their riches, knew, without doubt, the price of the acquisition that the sect had made in the person of the new missionary*.

CHAP. V.

St. Paul styles himself the Apostle of the Gentiles—Causes of his Success.

ALL proves to us that Paul and his associate Barnabas found it much easier to convert the Gentiles than the Jews, who showed themselves almost always rebels to their lessons. The docility of the first, and indocility of the latter may be traced to very natural causes; the idolators were destitute of instruction, their priests, content with exacting from them their offerings and sacrifices, never thought of instructing them in their religion; thus our missionaries encountered few obstacles in persuading them of the truth of the novelties which they came to announce to them. It was not thus with the Jews, who had a law, to which they were very strongly attached, since they were convinced that it had been dictated by God himself. In consequence our preachers could not make themselves listened to, but, in proportion, as the doctrine they preached agreed with the notions with which the Jews were previously imbued. The Apostles were therefore compelled to reason with the Jews, according to their own system, to shew them that the Christ whom they announced was the Messiah which they expected from their own prophets; in a word, in preaching the Gospel to the Jews, the preachers were driven into embarrassing discussions, and perpetually exposed to cavils and contradictions which they had no fear of on the part of the Gentiles, who received without disputing the novelties which they broached to them, and which besides agreed well enough with the notions of the pagan mythology, as we have shewn in another work.

On the other side also, the idolators had not the exclusive ideas of religion peculiar to the Jews; they were tolerant, they admitted every species of worship, and were disposed to pay homage to every God that was proposed to them. The Hebrews were not of this disposition, they believed

* Acts of Apostles, chap. 12.

themselves alone in the possession of the knowledge of the true God, and rejected with horror strange Gods and worships.

These reflections are sufficient to explain to us the reason of the great success that the Apostles had in preaching to the Gentiles, compared with their endeavours amongst the Jews; they likewise show us especially the true motives of Paul's conduct. In fact, repulsed by the cavils and opposition of the Jews, we see Paul and Barnabas turn themselves to the side of the Pagans, who listened to them with more attention and declared to the Jews, that God had forsaken them*.

The Gentiles were apparently flattered by the preference; numbers of them adopted the religion announced to them, which did not hinder the Jews from exciting, against our missionaries, the zeal of the female devotees whose clamour obliged them to quit Antioch.

From thence our two associates, after having shook the dust of their feet against their opposers, repaired to Iconium, where they again met with opposition on the part of the Jews who even irritated the Gentiles against them, which compelled them to fly to Lystra in Lycaonia. There according to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul thought it necessary to perform a miracle, well knowing that nothing is more efficacious than a prodigy in making an impression on the minds of the vulgar.

He then cured a lame man. This miracle convinced the idolators, who took Paul and his comrade for Gods, and under this idea would have offered them sacrifices. However this wonder did not produce the same effect upon the Jews; these apparently regarded it as a deception, or some trick of which they were not the dupes. In fact we see that the Jews, who nevertheless yielded to no people in credulity, so far from being moved by Paul's miracle, that they stoned him as a malefactor and left him for dead. From this unlucky affair he however extricated himself and returned to Antioch, whence he set out in order to give an account of the success of his mission, from which it appears that he had no reason for self congratulation, since, if he made a number of recruits for Jesus, he had succeeded at the expence of much personal ill usage.

Nevertheless the Nazarenes, or Ebionites, *i. e.* the first of the Jews, who had embraced the doctrine of the Apostles,

* Acts of Apostles, chap. xiii. ver. 45, &c.

were persuaded that the religion of Christ was merely a reformed Judaism. Always attached to the practices of the Mosaic law, they believed themselves called upon to evince their zeal in its favour; in consequence of which they pretended that the Gentiles, converted by the Apostles, ought, like themselves, to submit to the rite of circumcision. But Paul and Barnabas strongly opposed this opinion*; they were well aware that so painful an operation, especially after a certain age, would be very likely to dishearten the heathen whom they had drawn to their sect. But as the affair appeared very important they referred the decision to the Apostles who remained at Jerusalem. In consequence Paul and Barnabas, and also the partisans of circumcision, repaired thither, each with the view of maintaining their own opinion. The question was argued, and our two missionaries convinced the Apostolic College of the necessity of freeing the Gentiles from a rite at which they revolted. Thus, according to the author of the Acts of the Apostles, (who appears to have been devoted to St. Paul's party) it was decided, that the newly converted Gentiles should be exempted from a ceremony which, until now, had been regarded as highly essential, since it had been ordained by the Divinity himself.

There is reason to believe that the old Apostles did not subscribe without great reluctance to a decision which seemed to annul one of the capital points of the Mosaic law, and had the appearance of rectifying the ordinances of the Most High. Jesus himself in his infancy underwent the ceremony of circumcision; during his life he practised the customs prescribed to his nation; he formerly declared that he was come, not to destroy, but to accomplish the law of the Jews; and nevertheless we see St. Paul and his adherents, of their own authority, annul at one blow a ceremony of divine institution, approved of and observed by their master, and that for political and worldly considerations, which saints ought never to regard.

However this may be, by this decision, which Paul extorted from the Apostles, it seemed from that time to give the signal of the schism, which in the end totally separated the Jews from the Christians. Nevertheless we shall soon see Paul, who on this occasion took in hand the cause of the Gentiles, prepare (resuming the old errors) and circumcise

* See Acts of Apostles, chap. xv. ver. 5; see also in the second chapter of this work what is said of the Nazarenes.

a disciple himself. So true it is, that the greatest saints are not always consistent in their opinions, nor uniform in their conduct.

The Apostles having shewn so much indulgence in the article of the circumcision of the Gentiles, were, however desirous of giving a kind of satisfaction to the partizans of Judaism; with this view they prohibited the new converts from worshipping idols, from giving themselves up to fornication; and ordered them to abstain from things strangled and from the blood of animals. By these means they sought to conciliate every one; the Gentiles were not circumcised, and submitted themselves, in part, to the ordinances of the Jews, who thus saw a deference always paid to the law of their fathers, to which they were ever strongly attached*.

Furnished with this decision of the council of Jerusalem, in which the Apostles declare themselves authorised by the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, whence they were desirous of visiting the towns where they had already preached; but a contest respecting the choice of an associate of their labours, made a breach between our two missionaries and caused a separation between them. Barnabas accompanied by Mark embarked for the Isle of Cyprus, whilst Paul with Silas, his new companion, traversed Syria and Cilicia to confirm in the faith those who had been recently converted†.

* See Acts of Apostles, chap. xv. All seems to prove that the Apostles soon repented of the weakness they had been guilty of in ceding to St. Paul, for we find he formed a separate party, who preached the Gospel in his own manner, that is to say, the Gospel of the uncircumcision.

† It ought here to be remarked, that there exists yet a Gospel of the Nazarenes, the honour of which has been decreed to St. Barnabas, and in which Paul is roughly handled. In fact this Apostle preached, as we have shewn, besides uncircumcision, a doctrine very different from that of the Nazarenes, Ebionites, or first Christians, who, according to St. Irenæus, St. Epiphanius, and Eusebius, regarded Jesus merely as a man, the son of Joseph and Mary, and who was called the Son of God, only on account of his virtues. This may enable us to guess at the cause of Paul's quarrel with Barnabas, whose Gospel insinuates that Paul was in error in teaching that Jesus was God.

TO MR. R. CARLILE, DORCHESTER GAOL.

Hurdsfield near Macclesfield, January 5, 1823.

RESPECTED CITIZEN,

I HAVE, on behalf of myself and friends, to request your acceptance of £1. 12s. 8d. towards the liquidation of your Christian fines. It must be clear to every person possessing common sense and common honesty, that to impose on any individual a fine greater than such individual can pay is one of the grossest mockeries of justice which can well be conceived, and the Legislature that suffers a Judge to retain any such power can have no kindred with the community over which it acts. When we consider the cause for which your fine was imposed, namely, for vindicating the liberty of the human mind, we view you with mingled sentiments of admiration and respect.

It is notorious that those who are the most forward in the ranks of persecution are people professing religious sentiments! That those who say their religion breathes peace on earth and good will towards mankind, should be the first to inflict misery on their fellow creatures seems at first sight rather paradoxical; but an investigation of their religious books convince us that it is the contradictory sentiments which they contain that have caused that confusion and bloodshed with which the Christian history is so shockingly stained. We shall find in their religious books of peace and good will one sentence which declares, that "he who believeth shall be saved, and he who believeth not shall be damned," this barbarous and unphilosophical sentiment has caused more devastation and bloodshed than any other sentiment which ever was written. It is this ignorant* and brutal sentiment which hath enabled the Protestant to look unmoved on his Catholic victim, and the Catholic to enjoy the expiring groan of the Protestant heretic. To elucidate this part let us descend into the dungeons of the inquisition.

The pale victim, whose emaciated body hath been wasted by long confinement, stands arraigned before his Judge who thus addresseth him: "The unbounded mercy of our most holy religion induces us once more to implore a renunciation of your damnable heresies, do you believe that the sacramental elements are the very body and blood of our most blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?" Here the pale lips of the trembling victim begin to move, and he answers: "Although no sinner can entertain sentiments of deeper humility, or be more willing to render pure worship unto Almighty God than I am, yet reason forbids my assenting to the doctrine of transubstantiation."—"Obstinate heretic! dost thou oppose that blind infidel reason to the positive declaration of Almighty God—'Take and eat, this is my body,' &c.?" Now the unfortunate victim is consigned to his fate, and his Judges, glorying in his sufferings, exclaim: "How much better had it been for mankind had those vile heretics, Luther and

* Ignorant and brutal, because belief is not an act of the will, but a necessary result of the understanding.

Calvin, like this wretch, shook, with their agonising shrieks and deep convulsive groans, these prison walls to their foundation, than to have lived to disseminate that sentimental poison, by the deadly influence of which millions of immortal souls are now howling in hell, that would otherwise have been singing eternal praises to the lamb?"

Turning from this affecting picture, I would advise the religionist of every denomination, before he attempts to destroy the liberty and happiness of his neighbours, to ask himself whether his God or himself be the more proper to judge of right or wrong? and whether, having judged, he, a momentary worm, or the eternal and omnipotent God, be the more proper being to inflict punishment? I think the above question, sincerely asked, would be sufficient to destroy that spirit of persecution which, at present, is such a disgrace to the religious world. I wish to remind the religionist that the Theist is an inoffensive character, never persecuting those who differ from him in opinion; and as to the Atheist there is not so much difference between him and the sectarian as there is between the different sectarians. The Atheist merely rejects the God of the sectarian, while one sectarian does not only reject the Gods of all the others, but sets up one in opposition to them! Wishing Yourself, Wife, and Sister, may soon be rescued from the foul fangs of despotism,

I subscribe myself, on behalf of the Subscribers,

JOHN NEWTON.

	s.	d.		s.	d.
John Faulkner	0	6	Joseph Sutton	0	6
Thomas Swaine, a Deist	0	8	G. D.	0	6
John Ryle	1	6	James Watthall	1	0
David Rowbotham	1	0	E. Q.	1	0
Edwin Ditto	0	6	Thomas Stubbs	0	6
Elizabeth Ditto	0	6	John Ditto	0	6
Richard Nield	1	0	J. S.	0	2
L. W.	0	6	David Hurst, a Friend to Free		
Matthew Buckley,	1	0	Discussion	1	0
J. J. a little benefit is a great			W. F.	0	6
profit if bestowed in due			J. H.	0	3
time	1	0	W. S.	0	6
Henry Hardy	1	0	Robert Thompson	2	0
J. F.	0	6	J. T.	2	0
Joseph Fox, a Friend to Free			James Stott	1	0
Discussion	0	6	William Kent	1	0
J. O.	0	4	Thomas Whittaker	1	0
Abraham Shrigley	0	6	W. B.	1	0
Richard Ditto	0	6	Edward May	1	0
J. S.	0	6	H. T.	2	0
G. B.	0	3	H. S.	1	0
			John Newton	2	6

TO MR. JOHN NEWTON, OF HURDSFIELD,
NEAR MACCLESFIELD.

CITIZEN,

Dorchester Gaol, Jan. 22, 1823.

To you and other friends in Macclesfield, I have to return thanks for this and for former subscriptions.

You reason rightly upon the subject of imposing fines, and upon the hypocritical villainy of imposing heavy fines upon persons totally unable to pay them. In the case of myself and sister, the Legislature will have the opportunity of marking such conduct in the Judges either with approbation or reprobation. Strange compound as is the Legislature of this country, there are members of it, who are indignant at the treatment we have received, and who will take some steps in endeavouring to obtain for us a remedy.

You, Mr. Newton, are a sort of an old friend of mine, and I am happy to inform you, that there is scarce a town or village in the country but is more or less imbued with our principles. Where my publications have not reached, the inhabitants have heard that the Bible is openly attacked, and they naturally enquire upon what ground; then look carefully into it, and find that such attack is not without a warrant. I can assure you, that such is the case with hundreds and thousands in this country, where scarce a single copy of my publications have reached. It is upon this ground you may see the great utility of the Bible Society. The extensive circulation of the Bible has worked wonders in the way of rooting out superstition, for when none had Bibles, all were stupid believers in its divine origin, and in whatever their priests told them; now almost every person has a Bible, and hearing it attacked openly and fairly in Courts of Law, and in every possible shape, a general examination and enquiry is instituted, the result of which is inevitably favourable to our side of the question. Thus we shall proceed until the Jew Books are treated with more scorn than ever the Jews were throughout what is now called Christendom, whilst the latter will find themselves treated as human beings, and allowed all the rights of sociality and citizenship in the same proportion as their horrid books and customs, are rejected and treated with contempt.

Prosecutions are, in fact, a source of pleasure to me. I find fresh causes for joy at every case of the kind, for I see the good they have done, and the great good they must

continue to do, if still persisted in. They have given me an elevation, or an opportunity to be useful, which I never should have found without them, and this forms a source of secret satisfaction to me, which no kind of robbery on my property, or any other kind of persecution can fall.

Pleased with the progress you are making in your neighbourhood,

I remain your ardent Fellow Labourer,
R. CARLILE.

TO MR. R. CARLILE, DORCHESTER GAOL.

Hyde, December 24, in the Year 1822 of the
Ghost-begotten God.

ESTEEMED FELLOW CITIZEN,

AGAIN I have the pleasure of sending you, through the hands of Mr. Wheeler of Manchester, £2. 2s. 6d., the amount of a second subscription of the Republicans of this neighbourhood, towards paying the enormous and robbery-like fines imposed on you by the meek, humble, charitable, and enemy-loving Christians of Great Britain.

However pleasing and gratifying it may be to the minions of despotism to witness your incarceration till those fines are paid; however much the Christians may think they are doing their God a service by punishing you for exercising a right nature has bestowed on all her offspring; whatever exertions they may make to prejudice mankind against you, will not avail them much, while you proceed firmly and steadily in the paths of truth, and maintain the high and unimpeachable character you do at present. To advance any arguments, to urge any motives, as stimulants to your future exertions and perseverance; or, to recommend plans for your adoption, I think is quite needless: your strong and expanded mind has marked out for its future exertions a path truly noble, honourable, and useful; and has pointed out plans for your adoption, the effects of which, no religious sophistry can subvert, no punishment can retard, and the final and happy results of which, nothing can put a stop to—but death. I never think on the unmerited sufferings of you, your family, and servants, but with the mingled feelings of grief and indignation. As a disbeliever in all religious creeds and spiritualities, and as an advocate for universal liberty and free discussion, I protest against the infliction of any punishment whatever upon any individual for propagating his opinions and sentiments, however repugnant those opinions may be to the Christian “powers that be,” until they close the doors of all their Christian temples, and cease to propagate their opinions and doctrines. While the Christian priest continues to teach and publish to the world his opinions, sentiments, and doctrines, every other person has an equal right to do the same.

How changed is the conduct of these heroes of abuse and deception! But a few years ago, when no one was openly opposed to their system of delusion; when the "Age of Reason," and other works of the same kind were confined to the libraries of a few, and those few having scarcely courage to lend such books to their neighbours and friends; at this time the priests were frequently employed in denouncing each other as teachers of false doctrines, and each thinking his own was the only true road to their imaginary heaven, considered all the rest as in error, and therefore fit objects for his scurrility and abuse. No sooner had you begun to expose to public view the corruptions of the whole fraternity, no sooner had you shewed the uselessness and incapability of religion to make men wise and virtuous, than they began to think their craft was in danger, they all joined in full cry against you, like a pack of hounds after a cunning and wily fox.

I have been led by curiosity into three different Christian temples within the last six months, and twice, out of the three times, I was both shocked and disgusted to hear the lecturers in a mean and cowardly manner attack you and your principles. The latter time the preacher took as a motto to his lecture the following passage out of the New Testament: "What is truth?" I very much regretted I had not provided myself with materials for taking down some of the leading parts of this apostle's discourse, and thereby been enabled to give you some specimens of his doctrines, and perhaps his disposition too. As I was not prepared for taking down his discourse as delivered, and not liking to quote from memory, I must content myself with assuring you, that in the course of his harangue you came in for a full share of his Christian abuse.

Although it is notorious that the priests have the greater part of the press of this country at their command, I never yet heard that either of these Christian gentlemen ever wrote, or published any refutation of your doctrines, or ever endeavoured to convince mankind by fair and open discussion, that those doctrines were false, that they were published to the world from mercenary and interested motives, or that the moral effects of them produced characters conspicuous for their immorality, villainy, and debauchery. I never yet heard that these men had ever proved that any person professing sentiments and opinions similar to yours, was ever marched through the streets like the "Right Reverend Father in God the Bishop of Clogher, with his middle garments down about his heels." But allowing this to be the case, allowing that the imbibing your principles was calculated to make men immoral and miserable, I would put the question candidly to every Christian priest, and say, is it manly or unmanly, is it magnanimous or cowardly, to encircle themselves within the alleged sacredness of their tabernacles, and there impeach and vilify the principles, motives, and actions of an absent person, who has no chance of defending himself against such slanderers, nor would be permitted to defend himself even if he was present? Is it honest, or villainous, to endeavour to pervert the judgment of one individual, much

less of hundreds, to prejudice their minds against some victim of Christian bigotry and fanaticism, and thereby prevent their inquiring whether such victim be honest, or villainous, virtuous or vicious, or whether the doctrines he may think proper to publish to the world be true or erroneous? If this does not constitute moral assassination, I must confess myself incompetent to fix any precise ideas to the term.

What has been your line of conduct while combating the absurdities of the Christian religion? When you have been explaining and elucidating any subject on which you wished your readers to have correct ideas; have you, in a dogmatical manner, told them, that unless they believe all you say to be true they will be held in utter abhorrence by every good man, that they will be damned to all eternity? Happy is it for you, as an individual, happy is it for the cause you have espoused, happy will it be for millions yet unborn, your enemies have no such absurdities as these to lay to your charge. When discussing any subject on which there was a diversity of opinions, have you not invariably courted inquiry and having stated the case as it appeared to you, have you not requested your readers to exercise their own judgment on the merits of it, and not believe it to be true, because you or any other person said it was true? Does the Christian teacher do the same? Does he tell his friends that the Bible, on which their religion is founded, is a book, the truth of which has been denied? Does he tell them, there are men and books in the world that deny the truth of their creeds and doctrines? Does he advise them to exercise their reason, and by that reason to judge which is true; the Bible, or the works which deny its divine origin? Does he assist them to investigate their disputed system of religion, to ascertain upon what foundation it is established, and advise them to adopt it if it appears to them to be true, but reject it if it appears to be false? Does he encourage them to express their sentiments and opinions on all subjects without any reserve, and openly declare what they think of the doctrine he is continually forcing upon their attention? Does he ever shew any disposition to mitigate the punishment of any one who may have made himself obnoxious to the Christian craft, by boldly and openly exposing its frauds, and impositions; who is made to feel the effect of Christian sympathy and loving kindness, by being immured for years, ah! perhaps for life, in some dark and loathsome cell of the holy inquisition? Does he ever shew any willingness to soften the severity of the sufferings of his victims? nay, Does he not add to those sufferings every species of insult and slander? How little, how mean, how contemptible do these would-be-thought sacred gentlemen appear when we compare their professions with their practices, and judge of their actions as they appear to the world.

Happy should I be to see the conduct of these men answer the above question in the affirmative, but I despair of ever seeing them act so rational, so honest a part; for to borrow a scriptural phrase, "a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." Methinks I see the

rosy gills of some of the fat beneficed clergy partaking more of the crimson hue, and their fat cheeks distended with rage like the bellows of a pair of bagpipes, to see their sacred conduct made the subject of animadversion by one of the "swinish multitude!" Let them rage on; they are the servants of the public, and their conduct and actions are open to public scrutiny and remark; and I trust every friend to truth, justice, and free discussion will hold them up to public derision whenever they act inconsistent with their duty; for it is a shame to see men supported by the public at large, in splendour, luxury, and idleness; who are constantly recommending the practice of honesty, truth, justice, charity, and loving-kindness to those who choose to go and hear them; but when it becomes their own duty to put in practice any of these virtues, they either "pass by on the other side," or act quite the reverse.

I am willing to allow there may be priests whose conduct may, in some degree, be an exception to the above picture; but I shall not hesitate to say it is applicable to the greater part of the "glorious company of the apostles;" nor shall I hesitate to place in the front rank the *Candid Inquirer after Truth* above alluded to, and whose observations, during his discourse, has given rise to these reflections.

I must beg pardon for encroaching so much on your valuable time, I will therefore conclude with requesting you to give our best respects to your amiable Wife, and Sister, to Mrs. Wright, and all your incarcerated Shopmen; and for yourself, I beg when you open this letter, you will receive, through its medium, a hearty shake by the hand, accompanied by a thousand good wishes for your health, happiness, and prosperity.

I hope always to remain your sincere Friend and Admirer,
SAMUEL MERCER.

	s.	d.		s.	d.
Samuel Mercer	5	0	James Shaw, Ditto	1	0
Elizabeth Ditto	2	6	A Republican	0	6
Thomas Meadowcroft, a Republican	2	0	J. W.	0	6
B. J. a Republican	2	0	J. S.	0	6
J. S. Ditto	2	0	An Enemy to all such Men as		
C. O. Ditto	0	3	the Bishop of Clogher	0	6
J. F. Ditto	1	0	A Republican	0	6
J. J. Ditto	0	6	W. M'Ewen, Republican	1	0
Abraham Sidebottom, Ditto	2	0	J. Hilton, Ditto	0	6
Edward Redfern, Ditto	1	0	J. Simpson	0	6
W. Hunter	2	6	W. Hunt, Ditto	0	6
Samuel Mellor, Republican	0	6	A Pantheist Ditto	4	0
John Ryley, Ditto	0	6	D. Taylor, Ditto	2	0
A Friend	1	0	J. Parks, Ditto	1	0
Samuel Newton, Republican	0	3	B. Avison, Ditto	1	0
Joseph Gosling, Ditto	2	0	G. Whitaker	0	6
			J. Shepley	2	0

TO MR. SAMUEL MERCER OF HYDE, NEAR
MANCHESTER.

CITIZEN,

Dorchester Gaol, Jan. 23, 1823.

AFTER returning you and the Republicans of Hyde my thanks for the assistance contributed, and after expressing to you my pleasure at reading the contents of your ably written letter, I must take objection to one part of the character you have imposed upon the priests. You call them "the servants of the public." As one of that public I will not acknowledge them in any such character. To serve is to assist, to be useful: a priest cannot serve the public; he serves nobody, and works for nothing but his own private ends: an impostor is not a servant. The public needs no such services, no such assistance as they have to give. They command and do not serve. They impose falsehoods upon the public, and teach nothing useful to know. A school-master is a public servant of great value: but a priest is altogether valueless, and, what is still worse, injurious to the public.

I am sure that the simple objection I have taken will induce you to retract your assertion, that "the priests are the servants of the public." It was a slip of your pen and judgment at the moment of writing, and you will excuse the manner in which I have taken my objection, as I cannot think of recognizing public robbers and public impostors as "servants of the public." A servant is a very honourable character, which, I am sure, you never meant to apply to the priesthood.

Your description of the abusive lecturers is by no means surprising to me. They would not abuse if they could argue and refute, and instead of being offensive, I feel their abuse to be my honour. They are conscious of weakness, conscious of the strength of the principles opposed to them, and have no answer but abuse and persecution. Increasing in strength, in zeal, and in resolution to overthrow the priests,

I am, Citizen, respectfully yours,

R. CARLILE.